

**STATEMENT OF CONGRESSMAN RICK RENZI (AZ-1)
DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
CARES COMMISSION FIELD HEARING
NORTHERN ARIZONA VA HEALTHCARE SYSTEM
PRESCOTT, ARIZONA
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Chairman Alvarez and Members of the Commission,

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify before you today on the Secretary's Draft Capitol Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services (CARES) plan for the Prescott VA Medical Center. I appreciate your coming to Prescott to see and hear firsthand how well this facility serves Northern Arizona's rural veterans and how valuable it is to the Veterans Health Administration.

As you may know, this area has a long history of service to the nation. The Prescott VA Medical Center sits on the site of the former Fort Whipple military installation, a territorial outpost established to safeguard newly discovered mineral wealth in nearby mines. Soldiers stationed at the Whipple barracks participated in Apache Indian engagements. Downtown on the Courthouse square is a statute in memory of Captain William O. "Buckey" O'Neill who led a contingent of cowboy cavalry volunteers to join Roosevelt's Rough Riders in the war against Spain.

In 1918, the Army opened the Whipple hospital to treat patients with respiratory problems. Today, the Prescott VA Medical Center continues its mission to provide medical service to those who defended the nation.

I am pleased that the Secretary's draft plan recognizes the importance and value of this facility to the nation and the veterans it serves and proposes to retain and expand the inpatient and specialty care. As greater numbers of military retirees and veterans

move to the Southwest our highest priority has to be serving the health care needs of veterans. We must honor the commitment we made to them when they volunteered to serve the nation.

Expansion of the current facility in Prescott will ensure that veterans will receive timely and quality care, while reducing the demand for care in Phoenix. This allows the Veterans Health Administration to be more responsive to the veteran population health care needs today and into the future.

As a member of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, I realize the complexity of appraising the VA's infrastructure and evaluating how well it meets the needs of veterans. In reviewing the Secretary's draft CARES plan, I believe that the VA has done a thorough, universal projection of the veterans' health care needs today and in the future, and balanced that against the current health care services to decide how to improve delivery of care. We know that greater numbers of veterans are moving to Arizona. I have expressed in Committee and to Department officials the difficulty Native American veterans have experienced in getting timely care. This plan goes far in recognizing and providing for those needs of all of Northern Arizona's veterans. Veterans in my Congressional District and the local network individuals have stated that they are generally pleased with the manner in which the plan was developed.

In closing, I want to again thank the Commission for coming to Prescott. Veterans in Northern Arizona enjoy a great quality of life due in part to the excellent care they receive at the Prescott Medical Center and its outpatient clinics. You can be proud of the work done at this facility. These are individuals strongly committed to their work and to those whom they serve.